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HISTORY AT CENTURION: INDIA CONQUERS SA STRONGHOLD

Visitors win by 113 runs, become only the third visiting team after England and Australia to win Test at Supersport Park

KOHLI & CO BREAK RAFT OF RECORDS

The Test team under the leadership of Kohli ticked another box in their claim to be the best Test team in the world. The skipper became the first Indian captain to win two Tests in the Rainbow Nation. This win is a continuation of their excellent overseas Test record. They have now won Tests in England, Australia and South Africa in a single year | **P15**

BOWLERS AT IT AGAIN

- When Jasprit Bumrah caught Dean Elgar in front to leave the hosts at 5/130, the momentum changed. Shami, Siraj and Ashwin all picked wickets as SA lost the last six wickets for 61
- This is just India's fourth win in South Africa. They now have the chance to become the first Indian side to win a series there

ONE

SA IS THE ONLY COUNTRY WHERE INDIA ARE YET TO WIN A TEST SERIES

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TRICHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Congress lashes out at election commission, says it ought to have consulted experts and not politicians before taking the final call

All parties want UP polls on time: CEC

NAMITA BAJPAI @ Lucknow

CHIEF Election Commissioner (CEC) Sushil Chandra on Thursday ruled out deferring the upcoming polls in Uttar Pradesh saying all political parties have urged the poll panel to hold elections as originally planned. The poll notification will be announced in the first week of January, the CEC added.

The Congress, however, said the delegation that met the EC on Tuesday was "not authorised". During the interaction with the EC, the party's three-member delegation had reportedly favoured conducting polls as per original schedule.

Sushil Chandra

Later, the party changed its stance and took exception to the CEC's statement saying that only the Central government, not the political parties, has the details about the Covid situation. Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala said that being an autonomous body, the EC should have consulted experts, asked for data from the Central government and then taken an independent decision rather than acting like a 'toothless tiger'. "Constitutional responsibility of elections lies solely with Election Commission of India," he added.

The Allahabad High Court had on December 23 suggested that the Centre defer the UP election in view of a possible Omicron-led third Covid wave. The CEC, while interacting with reporters in Lucknow on Thursday, said the representatives of all political parties had met the panel demanding that the polls be held as per schedule with Covid protocols in place. He said the parties also gave their views on imposing restrictions on public rallies.

"I have been told 86% of people in the state have got the first dose and 49% the second shot of Covid vaccine. We have been assured that in 15-20 days, all eligible people will get their first dose. We have asked for increasing vaccination," he added. Chandra said the voting time would be increased by one hour from 8 am to 6 pm. The CEC said 11,000 additional polling booths would be set up across UP to avert crowding. "VVPATs will be installed at all voting booths. Live webcasting facilities will be available at around 1 lakh voting booths to ensure transparency," he said.

Worrying trends

The Centre on Thursday said Maharashtra, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Karnataka and Gujarat are emerging as states/UTs of concern amid a rise in Covid-19 cases. More than 20 districts are reporting high test positivity rates. A look

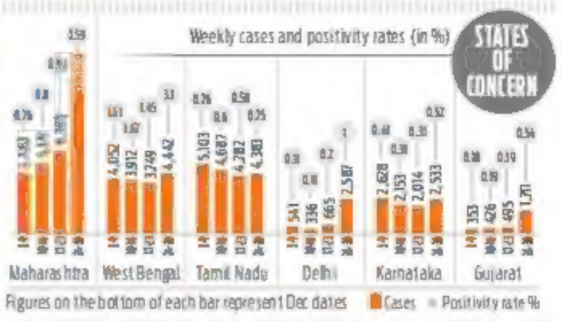
13,154 cases India has reported more than 10,000 daily cases after 33 days. Maharashtra alone saw 5,368 fresh Covid cases on Thursday, while West Bengal reported 2,128

Districts with weekly positivity rate above 10%

Mizoram	Lunglei	14.61
	Mamit	14.09
	Champhai	13.73
	Khawzawl	13.27
	Serchhip	12.5
	Lawngtlai	10.61
Arunachal Pradesh	Namsai	20.83
West Bengal	Kolkata	12.5

Districts with weekly positivity rate of 5%-10%

Kerala	T'puram	7.82
	Kottayam	7.3
	Pathanamthitta	6.06
	Ernakulam	5.79
	Idukki	5.57
	Kozhikode	5.32
Mizoram	Kolasib	7.87
	Aizawl	7.16
	Saiha	6.56
	Saitual	5.39
Arunachal Pradesh	Changlang	6.25
Assam	Dima Hasao	5.3
Jharkhand	Koderma	6.53
Manipur	Imphal West	8.76



961 India's latest Omicron tally after the detection of 180 new cases

263 Omicron cases in Delhi, the highest in India, followed by Maharashtra (252), Gujarat (97), Rajasthan (69), Kerala (65) and Telangana (62)

Covaxin shows higher antibody response in kids: Bharat Biotech
Phase 2 and 3 trial data showed that Covaxin produced 1.7 times more neutralising antibodies in children than in adults, the company said | **P9**

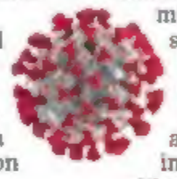
Mix or not? No decision yet on 3rd jab

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

THE Centre hasn't yet decided which vaccine will be used in the booster dose for healthcare and frontline workers and people aged 60 and above with comorbidities. But the head of the ICMR said recommendations will be available before January 10, when the administering of third doses is scheduled to begin.

Balram Bhargava, director general of the ICMR, said in a press briefing on Thursday that meetings are being held to examine locally available data.

Members of the Covid working group of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation have been discussing the number of people eligible for the third jabs, options of vaccines available, new vaccines and whether it will be the same or different vaccines.



Inputs from the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 and the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) will also be taken on the booster shot.

On December 25, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said booster doses for those aged 60 and above would require a doctor's prescription. Later, the Centre dropped the prescription clause.

There is no clarity yet on whether the government is going to adopt mixing of vaccines. Only limited data exists in India on the immunogenicity and safety of mixing. Earlier this year, a study on 98 people by the National Institute of Virology suggested that mixing Covishield and Covaxin provided better immunity than two doses of either alone, and it was more effective against variants.

The DCGI had earlier approved a larger study on mixing by Christian Medical College, Vellore, but results haven't been released yet.

TAKE YOUR SHOT
Dec 29 57,03,410 doses
Dec 30 59,53,308 doses
TOTAL DOSES 1,44,45,62,025

NATIONWIDE	DEC 29	DEC 30
Fresh cases	9,195	13,154
Recoveries	7,347	7,486
Deaths	302	268

KARNATAKA	DEC 29	DEC 30
Fresh cases	566	707
Recoveries	245	252
Deaths	6	3

Bandh off after CM holds talks with activists

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

CHIEF Minister Basavaraj Bommai's meeting with leaders of pro-Kannada organisations bore fruit, as he could convince them to call off the Karnataka bandh that was scheduled for Friday to demand a ban on the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES). The Kannada activists have, however, threatened to call for a bandh on January 22 if the organisation is not banned by then.

Despite pressure from various quarters not to hold a bandh on December 31 and many organisations not extending support, the pro-Kannada organisations had stuck to their guns. But, as pressure mounted, there was disagreement among those who had called for the bandh. **P7**

HATE SPEECH

SEER ARRESTED

Chhattisgarh police picked up Kalicharan Maharaj from a lodge at Khajuraho in adjoining Madhya Pradesh, and produced him before a court in Raipur, which sent him to two-day police custody | **P10**

Hint of anti-incumbency for BJP in ULB polls

DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI @ Bengaluru

THE Opposition Congress has fared better than the ruling BJP in the December 27 elections held for 58 urban local bodies across Karnataka, the results of which were announced on Thursday. Of the 1,184 wards which went to polls, the Congress won 501, leaving the BJP far behind at 433 seats. The JDS has clinched 45 wards while 195 Independents also won.

The BJP clinched majority in 14 ULBs including in Chikkamagaluru, Gadag-Betageri and Hebbagodi (Bengaluru) whereas the Congress got majority in 15 ULBs including Bankapura and Guttala town panchayats in Shiggaon Assembly segment in Haveri district represented by Bommai, Yaksamba in Belagavi, Nayakanahatti in Chitradurga and Kukanuru in Koppal district giving the jitters to ministers Shashikala Jolle, B Sriramulu and Halappa Achar, respectively who represent the Assembly seats. **P4**

POLL RESULTS
Total seats: 1,184
Cong: 501
BJP: 433
JDS: 45
SDPI: 6
AIMIM: 2
Janata Party: 1
AAP: 1
Ind: 195

Districts to be ranked, projects get major push

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

AT the fag end of the calendar year, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai gave a push for implementation of key projects at the grassroots level.

On Thursday, he announced that the government will soon come up with a ranking system to gauge the performance of Zilla Panchayats (ZPs) and their Chief Executive Officers (CEOs).

In a marathon meeting with the officers, the CM instructed them to strictly monitor the progress of Centrally-sponsored projects like the Jal Jeevan Mission and Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, and asked the officers to get out of their comfort zones, visit villages three days a week to understand and solve people's problems. On Friday, the CM is holding a meeting with district deputy commissioners.

The officers were informed that the government had taken malnutrition among children very seriously and directed them to conduct a survey of malnourished children and come up with a comprehensive programme to address the problem.

CONTINUED ON: P4

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BRIGHT MOMENTS FROM A BLEAK YEAR | P4

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Saurabh Shukla - NDTV India (Television)

SCIENCE & INNOVATION
Bhavya Dore - Fifty Two (Print)
Ganesh Raghunath Kale - News18 Lokmat &
Pallava Bagla - India Science Channel
(Joint Winners – Television)

SPORTS
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